

2021: A year of recovery, hope & confidence

As we leave 2020 behind, we look forward to 2021.

We hope this Newsletter finds you safe, healthy, and eager to join us in our ESU-activities.

2020 was an "unprecedented" year, a year like no other for everything and everybody. Even Chancellor Angela Merkel said in her last New Year's address to the nation that *"2020 was by far the hardest year of her 15-year leadership"*.

During the whole period of the COVID-19 crisis, Our ESU network kept in touch in many ways: through our newsletter, Facebook, video conferences... The ESU resolution *'Europe's recovery: building the future of fair and resilient societies -including all generations'* (August 2020 adopted by the EPP in September 2020) highlighted our concerns and hopes, called for more cooperation and preparedness to cope with pandemics and underlined that all initiatives, care services and restrictive measures must be supported by the principle of non-discrimination.

2021 will be a year of recovery, hope and confidence. We want the recovery of COVID-19 in Europe to be an opportunity to pave the way for a more inclusive, just and age-friendly society, based on democracy, the rule of law, and inalienable respect for human dignity. We look forward to 2021 with hope, emphasising the rights of older people and the ambition to play an active role in society. Let us make the voices of senior citizens heard, and let us ensure that older persons' participation is experienced as a gift and an opportunity.

Several meetings during the year 2021 provide opportunities to exchange experiences, deepen insights and, in consultation with leading experts, strengthen our commitment for an inclusive, democratic and resilient Europe.

In the first half of 2021 we will organise almost monthly a videoconference and debate related to 'the future of Europe'. At the end of 2021 we hope to meet again in person for the celebration of the anniversary of the ESU and thank all seniors for their belief in the role of our association.

We wish you a pleasant reading.

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Demographic change: challenges & opportunities

At EU level, several decisions, plans and publications give incentives for the development of a comprehensive strategy on ageing and intergenerational solidarity. Our aim in this newsletter is to bring you up to date on the various developments. In the current legislature, European policy aims to tackle the issues of ageing and demographic change. This was already indicated in [the mission statement](#) for the EU commissioner on 'Democracy and Demography', Dubravka Šuica: *"Those who feel left behind by progress and transition are the ones most likely to become disaffected. The root cause of this for many is more about demographic change than democratic structures. This is why I want you to lead the Commission's work on ensuring that Europe understands and responds to one of its deepest lying challenges: demographic change. This affects every part of our society: from the economy to healthcare, from migration to the environment. It also shapes our politics, society and culture, and has an impact on our place in the world."*

The commission is now doing a lot of work on this and, partly due to the COVID-19 issue, society sees that this is very important. COVID-19 is a catalyst to put the whole discussion about the elderly and elderly policy on the map.

1. EU Commission: Report on the Impact of Demographic Change (June 2020) and release of Green Paper on Ageing (27th January 2021)

- A. On the 20th June the European Commission adopted its first-ever '**Report on the Impact of Demographic Change**'. It presents the drivers of this long-term change and the impact it is having across Europe. It also highlights the links between demographic structures and the impact and recovery potential from the crisis. Vice President for Democracy and Demography, **Dubravka Šuica**, said: *"The crisis has exposed many vulnerabilities, some of*

which are linked to the profound demographic change already affecting our societies and communities across Europe. This double challenge must help shape the way we think about healthcare, welfare, public budgets and public life in the next decades. It must help us tackle issues such as access to services, community care and even loneliness. This is ultimately about the way we live together. Addressing demographic change is key to building a fairer and more resilient society."

B. The EU Commission released its **'Green paper on Ageing: Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations'**

This green paper will seek to launch a wide public debate on this issue. It will:

- Set out the key issues related to ageing;
- Discuss possible ways to anticipate and respond to the socioeconomic impacts of Europe's ageing population (In areas of Economy, Finance and the euro, Education and training, Employment and social affairs, Public health, Regional policy, Transport...)

This publication opens a 12-week consultation (from 27 January to April 2021) for all Europeans to debate on the challenges and opportunities of Europe's ageing society.

"Ageing affects every aspect of our lives, throughout our lives. As the current pandemic continues to challenge us, and as we fight to protect lives and livelihoods, we must not lose sight of a remarkable development: never before have so many Europeans enjoyed such long lives. This is a major achievement that is underpinned by the EU's social market economy ... In the last 50 years, our life expectancy at birth has increased by about 10 years. This creates new challenges and opportunities, and we want to open a debate with you."- European Commission

With the COVID-19 pandemic, a comprehensive and coordinated approach to demographic ageing has become more urgent than ever. The Green Paper and its consultation must gather the intelligence of all generations and of relevant actors to build on the lessons of the pandemic. This will be indispensable to propose a forward-looking agenda on ageing which lays foundations for dignity of wellbeing of everyone as we live and get older.

For More Information:

- [Report on the Impact of Demographic Change](#)
- [Green paper on Ageing](#)



2. Human Rights, Participation and well-being of older people in the age of digitalization

On 12th October 2020, the EU Council adopted conclusions on "Human rights, participation and well-being of older people in the age of digitalisation". The conclusions shed a light on several aspects of the living situation of older people, especially against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council refers to the legal frameworks already in place to guarantee the rights of older people. For example, the European Pillar of Social Rights calls for the compliance and implementation of various principles for better living conditions for all people, regardless of age. The Council conclusions call for the strengthening of social inclusion and intergenerational solidarity. The issue of ageing should be integrated into all policy areas. The situation of older people must also be taken into consideration especially in the pandemic exit or recovery strategies: older people should be heard in the relevant decisionmaking processes.

The Council conclusions create a perspective for policy in various sectors. It is clear that the conclusions concern not only 'older people at work' but also afterwards. Also in old age people must be able to fully enjoy their rights and feel part of society 'in the age of digitalisation'.

3. Trio Declaration on Active Ageing

Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, the Member States holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union during 18-month period from July 2020 to December 2021, have presented in December 2020 a joint 'Trio Declaration' and enumerated activities to be carried out during the three presidencies. See: Trio Presidency Declaration on Ageing

The Trio presidency calls for (shortened version):

1. Adopting an age-integrated, rights-based, life-course perspective approach to ageing;
2. Mainstreaming ageing in all policy fields in order to help societies and economies adapt appropriately to demographic change;
3. Adopting a life-course approach to ageing;
4. Following a rights-based approach in shaping exit strategies from the COVID-19 pandemic;
5. Ensuring that the requisite protective measures in times of health crises are proportionate in the extent to which such measures affect older persons' rights and interests;
6. Access to adequate and sustainable social protection systems and guaranteeing the right to health care, including equal access to health care that is based on an informed and specific consent and basing decisions in medical matters on ethical principles focused on human dignity, the protection of human rights and well-being and the achievement of the highest possible quality of life;

7. A stronger commitment of the EU Member States and the EU Commission to take measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and discrimination against older persons;
8. The active involvement of older persons in all decision-making processes affecting their lives and the development of mechanisms for the participation of relevant civil society organisations in decision making.
9. The promotion of active and healthy ageing, also by using the positive impact of digital technology in public services, such as health and social services.
10. Closing the digital divide between younger and older generations as well as between older women and men, namely by strengthening different forms of education and training, life-long learning opportunities and the development of skills;
11. Dedicating a separate chapter on older persons in the announced 2021 'Action Plan on the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights';
12. The identification of possible gaps in the international human rights system for older persons and if there are gaps, the development of adequate responses to close them...

16.02.2021: ESU Video Conference with Dubravka Šuica, Vice President for Democracy and Demography

We are pleased that the thematic area of older people is becoming a topic of discussion at various levels. We at the ESU are also addressing this issue; on 16 February, we will be organising an online event with guest speaker Ms Dubravka Šuica: ***'Europe's future: demographic challenges and opportunities for a strong recovery'***.

We are glad to invite our Executive committee for our video meeting from 11:00 to 13:00. (starting at 10:30 for members of the Presidium; they will receive a separate invitation). This meeting is for Executive Committee members only, but there is always room for someone more. If you are interested in attending and have not yet received an invitation, please contact us.

We are honoured to welcome Ms Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Democracy and Demography as keynote speaker. As recently the European Commission launched a 'Report on the Impact on demographic change (June 2020) and in December 2020 Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, holding the successive Presidency (July 2020-December 2021) of the Council of the European Union, presented together a **'Trio Declaration on Ageing'**, we are glad that Ms Suica, entrusted to lead the Commission's work as well in the area of Democracy as in Demography, will highlight the Commission's initiatives in both areas. She will demonstrate how both domains are cross-cutting and complementary.

Mr. Steven Van Hecke, Professor at the Kuleuven and administrator of the [‘Fund InvolvEU’](#), will moderate the panel (with **Mr. Heinz Becker**, ESU-vice-president and former MEP and **Ms. Carmen Quintanilla**, ESU- vice-president and former senator). He will lead us in the exploration around how citizens can get more closely involved in the EU.

19.01.2021: Video Conference with Herman Van Rompuy: Drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, to cope with future challenges for people and for the EU

On 19 January 2021, the European Seniors’ Union (ESU) organized its first video conference of the new year. It was an honor that President Emeritus of the European Council, **Herman Van Rompuy**, first full-time president of the EU Council (2009-2014), was willing to participate as our keynote speaker concerning: *‘Drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, to cope with future challenges for people, for the EU’*. As the German temporary Presidency of the EU just came to an end, two speakers complemented Mr. Van Rompuy’s speech: **Dr.**



Hardy Ostry, director of the Europe office of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) in Brussels and **Mr. Rolf Berend**, former Member of the European Parliament (1990-2009), President of the Senioren-Union of the CDU in Thüringen and member of the

Executive Committee of the ESU.



For more information on the videoconference, the speech of President Emeritus Herman Van Rompuy, the reflections on the Presidency of Germany of the Council,... Check out our [ESU website](#).

What our members tell us...

The video conferences organised by ESU are very much appreciated by our members. We get generally positive feedback at the end of the conferences and also via e-mail. It is an opportunity to learn about what is going on at the European policy level and to get inspiration for activities in one's own country.

Most associations have already taken initiatives to communicate with their members through alternative/digital means. We think it is very important to keep in touch and to support seniors in this. Some associations organised intensive training, others just practised by participating in the online meeting, but... it works!

Likewise, our ESU presidium member Lidmila Němcová points out: *"The Czech SKS has started to organise its committee meetings on a regular basis online, given the new situation. The last time, Mr Peter Mach, President of the Slovak Seniors' Association, Mr Marian Jurečka, President of the Czech Christian Democratic Political Party and Ms Jana Jochova, President of the Alliance for the Family, joined us online."*

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